

Basic understanding

I have come to the conclusion that although people want more software written for their particular micro, nobody is prepared to give away any secrets, so that more up-and-coming programmers can have a better understanding of the way a certain problem is solved by a computer.

In a previous edition of APC, in the Communications section, there was a cry of despair from a VZ-200 user for a word processor type program for the VZ-200. On reading through the Programs section of a few APC issues, it is easy to see why nobody (novices) can write programs for the VZ-200. It appears that those who know the deep dark secrets of programming would like to keep these secrets to themselves.

All of the programs that I have seen in APC for the VZ-200, have had no comments (apart from those with the authors name etc) in them. It doesn't take long to add a few comments into a program just to let the reader know what the program is doing. For example the following code is from a Basic program:

```
210 CLS:PRINT"RECORD NUMBER:";NF%+1:PRINT
220 FORL1=1TONR%:PRINTRN$(L1,1);:INPUTRC$(L1,NF%+1)
230 IF (L1=1)AND(RC$(L1,NF%+1)="") THENRETURN
240 NEXT:NF%=NF%+1:IFNF%<50THEN200
250 PRINT"DATABASE FULL!!!":FORL1=1TO1000:NEXT:RETURN
400 CLS:INPUT"WHAT RECORD";NU%
410 IF (NU%>NF%)OR(NU%<0) THEN400
420 IFNU%=0THENRETURN
430 .....e.t.c.
```

Wouldn't it be a lot easier to see what the program is doing (apart from spending hours tracing through it) if it were presented in the following form:

```
198 REM *****
199 REM ***          ADDING A RECORD          ***
210 CLS:PRINT .....e.t.c.
260 REM ***          END OF ADDITION          ***
261 REM *****
399 REM ***          CHANGING A RECORD          ***
400 CLS:INPUT .....e.t.c.
```

why this is a good practice to get in to.

There is no need to go overboard with the comments, but imagine a beginner in this wondrous field of

At least from there, the reader can see what the particular section of a program is doing; then if they want to go into any more detail, they can use their Basic reference manual. It also helps if there is a list of the variables (in REM statements), and what each variable is used for, at the beginning of the program. Another tip is to use variables that represent something. In the example, NU% is for Numeric storage, NR% is for Number of Records, L1 is for a Loop (there are three of these in the program, L1 ... L3), and RC\$ stands for Record Contents.

Some readers may think this all a gross waste of time and effort, but if their little micros ever acquire the capability of running other high level languages (eg, Pascal, Cobol), they will see

computing, sitting there with his/her reference manual, and trying to figure what the heck is going on in the first lot of code or what part of the program it is. I have visions of a 12/13 year old in tears, ripping up the manual, pulling the plug on the computer and vowing never to use it again.

If we want this industry to grow, lets share the secrets around so that the up and coming youngsters have the opportunity of learning from things that we had to find out for ourselves.

S Hobson